



COMMITTEE ON
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STATEMENT**

**Opening Statement of Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC), Republican Leader Education and Labor Committee, Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment Hearing: “Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Reauthorization: Creating Employment Pathways for Dislocated Workers”
May 27, 2021**

(As prepared for delivery)

“The skills gap is a growing concern for all sectors of the American economy and it impacts businesses and workers alike. In February of this year, a McKinsey study estimated that 45 million Americans – that’s a quarter of our workforce - will lose their jobs due to automation by the year 2030.

“Perhaps more concerning is the study’s second conclusion; only 14 percent of those employees are likely to find new work, leaving an estimated and unprecedented 39 million Americans jobless.

“And the pandemic threatens to exacerbate this troubling trend. We know that during economic recessions companies turn to machines and automation as an alternative to human labor. However, even with increased automation, businesses across the country still have open jobs but are hampered by a lack of skilled workers. This is not an abstract concern; even before COVID-19, seven million jobs were unfilled due to the skills gap.

“Wayne Gretzky was the greatest hockey player ever, and he once observed he never wanted to skate to where the puck was but where it was going to be. The same is true in workforce development. If our workforce system focuses on today’s jobs only then we won’t be equipped for the economy of the future.

“Which is why we are here today - to learn from folks on the ground. What is working? What isn’t? How can we get out of your way to expand upon the innovation that business is already leading?”

“By battling this problem now, we can remove bureaucratic barriers to help millions find employment opportunities today and nearly a quarter of Americans avoid dislocation and unemployment in the future.

“As we consider a reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, our primary goal and focus should be creating additional pathways for workers to reskill and upskill to meet the demands of our evolving 21st century economy.

“I am encouraged by the Democrats’ commitment to examine this reauthorization thoroughly and am hopeful we will come to a solution that works not just for politicians, but for the people who have everything to gain from these vital, jobs-saving efforts.

“The word I keep coming back to when discussing WIOA programs is in the hearing title: pathways. Congress creates pathways when we remove unnecessary barriers and offer services that help workers build skills that lead to lasting, successful employment and self-sufficiency.

“Most importantly, these pathways must be responsive to the needs of business and industry. A workforce system that does not provide workers with in-demand skills for the region is a poor use of taxpayer dollars and could handicap our nation’s economic growth and global competitiveness for years to come.

“We must ensure that any federal initiatives embrace technological advances and economic innovation so that our workforce development programs can meet regional economic development needs. This will require the power of the free market to create an economy better than anything government can mandate into existence.

“I thank the witnesses for joining us today for a productive discussion about how to reauthorize WIOA to ensure that 21st century workers are prepared to meet 21st century challenges.”

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